August 7. 2022—19th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Many years ago, on a train passing through France a young university man saw an old man, shabbily dressed praying his Rosary. The young man scoffed, saying, “I see you still believe that medieval claptrap about praying your beads, and I suppose you believe in the Virgin Mary and all the religious hog-wash that priests tell you.” He replied, “Yes, my boy, I do.” The young man said, “If you were smart, you would throw out those beads and learn about the latest science.” The old man replied, “I’m afraid I don’t understand.” He felt a little sorry for being so harsh and said, “If you can read, I’d be happy to mail you some literature.” The old man fished in a pocket for a card which read, “Louis Pasteur, Paris Institute for Scientific Research.” He was one of the greatest scientists of his time.

Just as in Pasteur’s time, there are many who say we should only accept things which can be proven by science; faith and religion are not knowledge that you can rely upon. Even though people claim to want scientific truth, today, feelings are more important than facts or sound reasoning. Ideology and politics trump even what your eyes tell you. It is like the Pharisees who wouldn’t believe their own eyes and accept the miracles of Jesus as a sign that He was from God.

The Second Reading from Chapter 11 of the Letter to the Hebrews is a catalogue of the Old Testament saints, beginning with Abraham. We heard the famous definition of faith: “**Faith is the realization of what is hoped for and evidence of things not seen.**” Faith is a different kind of knowledge than science, but it is a real kind of knowledge. It is evidence of things not measured, not weighed, but revealed by God.

When it comes to the great questions of our time regarding marriage and human sexuality, God has given us clear direction and written His moral law upon the human heart. The Church has Divine Revelation and 2000 years of experience on these moral issues, while the culture is ever changing and degrading the human person and sexuality in every way. The pressure to turn from faith in what God has revealed is tremendous. Will I follow Christ or the world, the flesh and the devil?

We don’t understand marriage and human sexuality in a vacuum, but from a Catholic perspective. In Genesis, the first command that God gave to Adam and Eve was “**Be fruitful and multiply**” (Gen. 1:28). Married love is **fruitful**. It is the last of the 4 characteristics of marriage that Pope St. John Paul taught in the Theology of the Body: free, total, faithful, fruitful.

Pope St. Paul VI also used those ideas when he wrote the Encyclical Humanae Vitae in1968 to answer the question whether contraception, particularly the birth control pill, invented earlier in the decade, was immoral or not. In it he taught that God had two purposes for marriage, put simply, love and life. Marriage was not for lust nor for selfishness, nor that my spouse will make me happy; it is for love and life.

Marriage was intended to unite the couple in the unbreakable bond of love (the self-gift of Pope St. John Paul) to help one another in this life and to lead to eternal life. Marriage points to the eternal wedding banquet of the Lamb in heaven that the Book of Revelation speaks about. The second purpose, which was linked to the first, was to cooperate with God in conceiving and raising children. The love of marriage is designed by God to be fruitful in bringing new lives into the world. True love is never sterile; it always brings about good. In the case of the marital union, it has the possibility of husband and wife to be co-creators with God and bringing a new life into the world. The birth control pill defeated the second purpose, Pope St. Paul VI taught. He gave approval to Natural Family Planning, which uses the God-designed patterns of fertility in a woman to achieve or avoid pregnancy when there was a sufficient cause. Back then it wasn’t known that the birth control pill is an abortifacient. One of the three chemical effects to stop a baby, acts to cause an early abortion keeping the newly conceived child-embryo from implanting in the mother’s womb.

This teaching had a reception that was lukewarm at best. It was just at the beginning of the sexual revolution of the 60’s, which wanted sexual pleasure without responsibility, leisure and possessions without the restrictions and the expense of children. Even though the culture accepts it as normal, the Church from earliest times, has consistently taught that abortion and birth control were immoral.

Only God knows how many children He wants each couple to have, whether one or many or even no children, which can often be a unique Cross. I want you dear families to know that if you listened to God and followed His teaching on marriage how much our Lord appreciates your sacrifice. Especially, the large families, which are often ridiculed and looked down upon. God knows and loves you for your sacrifice; He doesn’t forget!

We look to our own patron saint for an example; she made the sacrifice of her very life so that her 4th baby could be born. St. Gianna told her husband Pietro that no matter what happened to her, they were to save the baby because she valued life so much. Don’t forget the heroism of Pietro who had to raise 4 young children without the help of his beloved wife. He made many sacrifices of himself because he believed in the sanctity of marriage and of the family that they began. To be continued.